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NEW PHENOMENA IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE  
COUNTRIES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

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THE STUDY OF NEW PHENOMENA IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRIES  
OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

Following is a translation of an article by Milintije Popovich in Nasha Stvarnost (Our Reality), No 4, Belgrad, 1960, pp 417-429.

A single analysis cannot hope to answer all questions which arise in connection with the social development of Southeast Asia. Let it suffice here to pose problems and formulate certain methods of analysis which will be more adequate than the ones to which we Europeans have been accustomed to almost spontaneously employ. This will require a certain change in our inherited, inaccurate concepts of these countries which will enable us to formulate methodic and logical working hypotheses to study this section of the modern world. Certain misunderstandings and divergent points of view are, of course, inevitable in such a discussion, and may even increase as the problem is studied in detail.

Problems in studying the social order of undeveloped countries.

The study of the methods of social development in undeveloped or underdeveloped countries is both an important and a complex problem. This is especially true, I should say, in the case of the countries of Southeastern and Eastern Asia. Here we encounter new, unknown forms of society and social movements which simply do not fit the concepts and categories which we have created when dealing with social developments in Europe. In studying these countries we must change our concepts concerning the growth of society and the laws of evolution of society in general, and especially concerning the means by which a modern society moves in the direction of socialism. This is perfectly natural, as world development and the inclusion of these great and important sections of the world in the world-collective, no longer as the colonies of yesterday but as independent units, must of necessity create new concepts in our minds, otherwise our understanding will be inaccurate and incomplete. This does not imply that we are to abandon the basic methods for studying societies which we have inherited from Marx, Engels and Lenin; on the contrary, only by employing those methods shall we be able to reach scientific conclusions as related to these countries, providing, of course that we are capable of original and scientific method, meanwhile dealing with actual social realities and not the ideas that we have hitherto pre-formulated.

It is especially important to remember that we are dealing here with a section of the world which has had a very different historical development than Europe. Whereas European society has developed along more or less clearly discernible lines of social formation from slavery through feudal, capitalistic, and now socialistic society, in many Asiatic countries such clearly discernible social developments have never existed, nor have the phases from one formation to the next been clearly expressed. In the European sense there has been no change in the social formation of these countries, hence, neither in the development of society nor in the growth of ideas have relationships and categories been differentiated in the same manner as in Europe, although we are accustomed to believe that developments in those countries approximate those in Europe.

The production of goods in several Asiatic countries (China and India) made its appearance at about the same time as in the Mediterranean civilization of Antiquity. In the latter society goods were produced by slave labor. Upon this society there arose the state which provided a foundation for democracy and the expression of free scientific thought (within the framework of the ruling class, of course). Due to its internal, unsolvable contradictions, raids of the barbarians, etc., this society collapsed and European feudalism arose from the ruins, later to be succeeded by capitalism, with a gradual transformation to modern socialism.

The social structure of the countries of Southeast Asia, where more than two thousand years ago the production of goods also appeared, did not collapse, but has continued to exist. Capitalism, however, and the capitalistic social structure did not come into being here. Means of production never developed to the extent of becoming a decisive factor in social life upon which a state could be founded with free democratic functions, even among the ruling classes, and there arose on these means of production various kinds of despotism.

Because capital and capitalistic production methods were the products of Europe, they were introduced from without into the lands of Southeast Asia in the forms of imperialism and colonialism. In a certain sense, as regards social development, the countries of Southeast Asia have thus stagnated, or, more exactly put, have not developed at the same rate or with the internal qualitative changes in social relationships as has European society. Because, in my opinion, the results of this are exceedingly important, it is essential to study the causes of this historical development if we wish to establish the nature of the social relationships which these countries have inherited and under which these peoples still live. Certain of Marx's basic theories on this will be enlightening. We must establish what it was that replaced capitalism during the period of colonial oppression, exploitation, and connection with the metropolises, and only on the basis of such study can we form opinions and draw conclusions regarding the present and future trends and manners of these countries' developments.

Immediately evident is the fact that in many of these countries various social formations, ranging from the most archaic to the most highly-developed, modern capitalistic, and even government-capitalistic, exist side by side. These archaic social formations are not simply unimportant vestiges of the past which are found in backwoods parts of the country; they are widespread and have a very definite effect on the contemporary governments, economic structures, and government-economic policies. They also influence the superstructure: social consciousness, ways of thought; and frequently scientific thought is to be found alongside mythological philosophic and religious concepts, even in the same person.

It is for reasons such as these that the ideological framework in which contemporary movements and social trends manifest themselves is difficult for us Europeans to grasp and demands that we analyse as concretely as possible the social processes and their expressions in ideas and thoughts in these countries.

#### Accumulation as the main problem of society.

I shall proceed upon what seems to me to be the most adequate assumption: that the basic problem in undeveloped countries of Southeast Asia is that of accumulation. At first glance this is clear and understandable, and I have formulated it in this manner (rather than as a problem of economic development) because the problem of accumulation as I understand it, and as I shall attempt to explain, is greater than the problem of economic development understood as the percentage of national income to be used for development. Actually, this problem should not be regarded as a purely quantitative one, but an economic one and, I should say, a technocratic approach to the problem. Certain European and American economists, going on the basis of powerful countries (those with highly-developed industries, capital, and capitalistic organizations, where the problem of the transformation to state-capitalism is inherent and where the main problem of economic development is to ascertain the extent of accumulation expedient to maintain so-called temporary stability as an economic control), are always inclined to treat the problems of accumulation and economic development in the above manner and within narrow economic and technological limits. Actually, their concepts are limited to the following: accumulation is an exclusive function of capital; the countries of Southern Asia have insufficient capital to develop, which means that they must borrow in order to circulate private capital and must eventually strengthen certain government control measures, and that in order to obtain capital from those countries which have it a "favorable climate" must be brought about, etc.

In the countries of Southeastern Asia capital is but poorly developed as is the capitalistic production of goods (which is not the main means of production). On the other hand, in these countries the problem of accumulation is basically a social one in a much broader sense, i.e. it is a problem of creating the most expedient form of social organization to fit social, and above all, economic development in relationship to both the international situation and internal conditions.

In the undeveloped countries of Asia capitalism has never been able to develop to the extent of becoming the major, all-inclusive social-economic system, outmoding all other archaic forms of life and transforming social patterns into capitalistic ones. All the problems of these countries today stem from the fact that capitalism has never been able, historically, to bring about extensive reproduction on the basis of capitalism at a level guaranteeing even a minimum of progress. Why capitalism has failed in this, why it was able to take over only a small section of this society, how much of this is to be explained by the fact that capitalism appeared in the form of colonial exploitation and not as a product of the internal development of the society itself, whether this is to be explained by the internal structure and laws of development of the society as such - must all be studied if we are to find solutions to the problems of further development of these countries and their place in the modern world.

In spite of the great efforts made during the ten years of their independence, these countries have not been able to solve the problem of accumulation. Neither have they been able to meet the ever-increasing problems of feeding their populations or of unemployment, and it is evident that their rate of economic development is unsatisfactory. Progress in the highly-developed countries, on the other hand, continues (and there are indications that as state-capitalism becomes an ever more important part of their structure this progress will be ever greater), while the discrepancy that separates them from the undeveloped countries threatens to become greater still. The countries of the so-called socialistic camp are also developing more and more rapidly and are already becoming countries with the most highly developed economies. Thus their very position in the world economy forces these undeveloped countries toward a definite solution to the problem of rapid economic development.

On the basis of the above, it is evident that the problem of accumulation is the problem basic to these countries as concerns their development and even their existence as independent nations.

For many undeveloped countries there can be no question of creating accumulation by means of private capital, i.e. orientation according to the capitalistic methods of development: whereby time and social conditions are such that capital, by itself, through internal development and the profit motive, could bring about accumulation for further development and whereby the social structure would grow from this, i.e. produce the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the entire social-political structure would develop on such a basis. This is physically impossible, as capital cannot accomplish this. (Why it cannot is another question and requires a scientific explanation). And the bourgeoisie class is incapable of playing a social-historic role of this kind. In addition, all the social and political consciousness of the broad masses in these countries speaks against this. Today the masses will no longer be subjected to crude methods of primitive accumulation by private capital, as this would mean a worsening of their already

difficult conditions. This is also the cause of numerous and frequent criticisms of the capitalist system and the capitalist road to development, which can be heard in those countries not only from representatives of the working class, but from other classes of people. Today such criticism is a very noticeable symptom in the countries of Southeast Asia (the criticisms are often vague and confused for the very reason that they originate from such a variety of social conditions and classes; for example, the development of the village along capitalistic lines is often opposed by the ideal of a traditional archaic and autarchic village economy). This criticism also extends to the bourgeois political superstructure which, just as its economic basis, does not fit these countries. The shortcomings of a transplanted Western parliamentary democracy are pointed out and there are endeavors to liquidate this in form or another.

#### State Intervention as the Road to Solving the Problem of

#### Capital Accumulation

It is a familiar fact that a feature of the countries of which we are speaking is their tendency toward state capitalism. In this they have copied, to the extent possible, the techniques of Western state capitalism, notably those of Great Britain under the Labor regime. An exception of course is China which as we know has chosen a different road.

Ten years of independence (in other words, a status in which these countries no longer a part of a capitalist-imperialist world or its periphery and its subordinated and exploited part but are independent and sovereign entities, living under a legal system are peculiarly adapted to their own social essence)--these ten years have demonstrated that a system of state-capitalist processes transmitted from the West is inadequate and inappropriate because, in first place, it does not solve the problem of capital accumulation.

This system of state capitalism evolved in highly developed countries which had attained that phase of development where the power of the state manifested itself as the crucial factor of economic relationships but in such a context that signified only the control and regulation of a historical capitalism and of natural resources already developed by capitalist accumulation, and already developed and specific productive factors. When applied to the countries of South Asia such techniques of state capitalism showed that it was unsuited to resolve the question of development, because it was not the outgrowth of the development conditions and needs of these countries.

In other words, the Western type state-capitalistic system was unable to solve the problem of accumulation.

Personally, I am of the opinion that in China the problem of accumulation was put on the same basis, although in a different political framework.

China became free and independent only after a long struggle, a war, and a civil war. There was then established a strong, politically and organizationally-centralized government. Then, as a result of historical conditions, there was set up an economic and administrative government mechanism which, in the initial phase was a copy of the system in the Soviet Union during the most typical and totalitarian rule of Stalin's bureaucracy. Whereas the other countries of Southeast Asia imported the laborite state capitalistic system, China introduced the Salinist type of administrative system for directing the national economy. I am of the opinion that this system proved unsatisfactory in China and did not meet the problem of accumulation in accordance either with the objective requirements of China or the subjective desires of the leaders of that country. It must also be recalled that China came out of the civil war with extraordinary internal revolutionary dynamism, which is of great importance for the present objective movement and the subjective situation and orientation in China.

Because of this another method was sought to solve the problem of accumulation in China, and which, logically enough, was to intensify the administrative-bureaucratic methods. There appeared the so-called "communes." Why they were called this is beyond my knowledge, as they had nothing in common with Marx's understanding of the term. They were actually a form of economic administration that Stalin had used in the Soviet Union. At first there was a certain degree of success; soon, however, there was regression and this regression came from two directions. First, the "plans," i.e. the original planned goals, were changed, (which meant that this super-bureaucratic system, in spite of all efforts, was unable to produce what it had hoped to), and secondly, certain of the most bureaucratic functions within the "communes," i.e. systems of awards, etc., were changed.

At present other methods of accumulation are being sought in China to hasten development, i.e. more rapid accumulation than that achieved following independence and the establishment of the new government. And here we must search for the causes of the vacillation and the changes that are taking place in China.

Hence, the basic problems of development in China are similar to those in the other countries of Southeast Asia, but the political framework in which attempts are made to solve them is different.

Here, I think, we should seek the reasons why the so-called Chinese experiments from 1956 to 1959 awakened such great interest in the countries of Asia, although the introduction of the "communal" system and the political consequences that followed, both inside China and in her international politics, especially in her relations with other countries, made it clear that this was not the way to solve the problem of accumulation.



The nations of Southeast Asia will have to seek a new solution based neither on the Western nor the East European model, but something totally new.

Thus we see: first, there is increasingly developing and becoming more acute, a social-political crisis in these countries; second, lawful methods are being sought to transform society and to establish a new social organization which will be able to solve the problem of accumulation.

There is one common factor in all these countries: some bond is sought between the government as an official apparatus, and the masses, whereby the problem of accumulation may be solved. Attempts to introduce new ideas and put them into practice differ, and there are various ideological-political tendencies at work which are frequently spontaneous in nature and are in accord with the tradition and the background of those in power, their outlook on life, etc. Throughout all these tendencies, however, there is recognition of the fact that the systems which have developed under the historical and social conditions in the West and in the Soviet Union cannot be successfully transplanted in these countries with their peculiar material-, social-, and class conditions. Hence, new, specific, solutions are being sought by attempting to amalgamate one or another type of statism with the workers, asking their active cooperation, and engaging the masses to solve "their own" economic problems "themselves" in view of the unusually great and insufficiently employed reserves of human labor which must be mobilized.

Very obviously, this cannot be automatically called socialism. New forms of government are being attempted which must be studied in detail. One must, however, beware of calling all changes in social structure socialism or socialistic tendencies. We know the magnitude of the error in calling all government regulation of economics, or changes in the laws of capitalism - socialism. Whether or not a phenomenon is actually socialism will depend upon what happens to the various classes and to class struggle, and in the realm of the political superstructure. Only then can conclusions be drawn as to whether these changes are by nature objectively and subjectively socialistic. A similar logical and political error may be committed if we attempt to herald every change away from the Western state-capitalistic system or the Stalinistic administrative system as a step toward socialism. Here also we must first observe the effects of such changes on the classes, on class relationships, and on the overall political superstructure, and only then draw our conclusions. Just as changes in the state-capitalistic line have produced two opposing tendencies in the political superstructure: from Fascism to social-democratic parliamentary state capitalism, so we may expect at present unusually great variegation in political structures and tendencies, each of which must be studied individually and concretely.

It is characteristic, and certainly not incidental, that the countries of Southeast Asia have become very interested in Yugoslavia, in the methods and social structures which are used there to hasten

accumulation. Because experience has shown that neither classical capitalism nor statism can provide satisfactory solutions to their problems, the people of these countries are very naturally interested in the experience of a country which, through its forms of social-economic and political organization, its system of labor- and social self-government, has perhaps achieved the most in the sense of activating the masses as a means to hasten economic and social development and has also gone far in the opposite direction of capitalism and statism.

#### Crisis of the social-political structure.

The existing situation points to the fact that in the countries of Southeast Asia the entire social-political structure is in a state of crisis, or, more exactly, in a state of ferment and change. This is not simply due to a crisis in the party system of the individual lands, it is a question of basic class and political regroupings. As this is still in an initial stage, it is still difficult to establish the nature and purpose of this. I should simply like to point out that the party-political superstructure is part of the social-political structure in this crisis. Such a situation allows for several possibilities of development. In certain situations exceedingly reactionary regimes may come into power which could fortify the state-capitalistic controls and put power into the hands of the bureaucracy. Such a regime could even attempt by various means to activate the still backward masses, especially those in the villages. This in itself, however, would not alter the nature of the regime. In a regrouping of the forces about which we are talking, there undoubtedly exist forces and tendencies which seek a solution to the crisis in a development toward socialism. It seems to me that these tendencies are the strongest, both as concerns the objective state of affairs, and the subjective forces. Solid analyses are necessary, however, to ascertain which roads lead to socialism in these countries.

#### Obsolescence of parliamentary democracy.

Frequently the question arises as to the fate of parliamentary democracy in the countries of Southeast Asia. I believe that we may safely say that parliamentary democracy, a product of Europe, is outdated in these countries and does not meet their needs. We must be cautious, however, not to identify the existence of one or another party with parliamentarism or civil democracy, not to identify the nature of parliamentary democracy with the existence of one or another party.

We have grown accustomed to think of democracy and dictatorships in categories which have grown out of capitalistic societies. In these countries, however, the political superstructure has developed on a social-economic foundation whose nature is not fixed, or at least is not basically and exclusively fixed in the capitalistic-production sense. Hence the political superstructure cannot be defined as bourgeois

in the European sense or in the sense of those countries where capitalism has succeeded as a social system. These are countries, moreover, which regularly go through periods of basic social changes which, as can be seen from the foregoing, will have to progress from their present state, which is one of undeveloped capitalistic-bourgeoisie systems, to a state which is not, and cannot be, capitalistic. Actually, it is one thing when all social life exists on the foundations of a capitalistic society, the basis of which is the capitalistic means of production, the social structure developing from this basis and within the framework of which various political regimes, from parliamentary democracy to one or another form of dictatorship arise. It is quite another thing when the political superstructure grows out of a completely different social structure which is not bourgeois, (and all agree that in these countries it is not, but has specifications of its own), and manifests an objective tendency to develop along non-bourgeois-capitalistic lines. This clearly indicates that the social existence of a political entity, such as bi-party parliamentary democracy, has a completely different significance in such surroundings than under actual conditions of capitalism. Dictatorship also has another meaning. What this is is another problem which requires detailed study.

It seems to me that simply because the state capitalistic system with its parliamentary, bi-party democracy has proven itself incapable of solving the problem of accumulation, it cannot therefore be taken for granted that other parties should not come into existence to alter the political superstructure and the social-political structures, and solve the problem of accumulation. I am of the opinion that certain of these countries will continue to develop, and will develop true democracies which will be able to solve the accumulation problem and will progress toward socialism. This does not mean that this development will be along the lines of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. To the extent that this true democracy develops as a phenomenon natural to these countries, - to the exact same extent will the political parties not be bourgeois parties of the parliamentary democratic type. It seems probable that these countries will gradually change by way of evolution, and through the existence of several parties, will alter their social structure until there will finally be no party politics as such. The disappearance of the party system as a form of politics cannot always be brought about by first creating a single party political organism which will gradually wither away. Party politics can also wither away when there exist multi-party organisms.

#### The development of self-government in India

As I have already pointed out, in many countries of Southeast Asia capitalism has proven itself impotent, while state-capitalism has been both unsuccessful and impotent. A third solution is frequently sought in certain traditional systems which still exist as the vestiges of primitive, archaic societies. In India these ancient village units,

the panchayatas, have been employed as a basis on which to develop a more modern social system. Originally the panchayantas were primitive, archaic, natural units, but they gradually gave way before the power of colonialism. Lawfully renewed after liberation, they constitute an extension of the government machine, its lowest unit. Attempts are now being made, however, to make the panchayantas the social unit upon which to create accumulation, a unit which a society will develop which is dependent upon the production of goods. These units, elected by the people, are responsible for economic, educational, and social development in a social system which, as a whole, is developing toward a modern society based on the production of goods. Thus, units which have their origin in the archaic village have been transformed into units which must change the still preponderantly natural conditions of Indian village life. It is possible that this is the only means of transforming a natural society which is strongly conservative. Attempts are not only being made to renew and establish the traditional panchayantas, but also to introduce certain qualitative social changes within the political superstructure. The panchayantas in the villages, which have great authority in economic, political, and social questions, must, beside supporting the government, bring about social-political conditions which will make possible a more rapid accumulation. Such, at least, are the ideas of the progressive politicians of India. According to the opinions of the social leaders of India today, the panchayantas must form the basis of modern society, a society based on production of goods, not natural production.

Mention has been made of the relationship between self-government and government in India (and in other countries) as being in a process of further development. We maintain that these two phenomena should not oppose each other as this is a process with internal contradictions. In all these countries the governments and their functions must be supported; they must, however, remain flexible enough to solve the problem of accumulation and move more and more in the direction of self-government.

#### Class relationships

The changes in the political superstructure which are at present taking place in certain countries of Southeast Asia, caused by complex internal factors (and to a certain extent by international ones) cannot solve existing economic problems until changes in the superstructure have been made in the direction of socialistic democracy. Class relationships based on economics will remain unsolved, the bourgeoisie will continue to exist, and in spite of individual movements, partial agrarian reforms, etc., even certain feudal elements will remain. The bourgeoisie is even becoming stronger, and not in a relative sense, i.e. relative to other social forces, but in an absolute sense. This is important, as it means that as a class it will be satisfied only if it has sufficient power to express itself and, at least temporary, make manifest its complete hegemony in politics. This can be verified by certain new tendencies

connected with the Svatantra party in India and the influence which this party and its leaders exert on certain members of Congress and certain circles in the Indian socialist movement. Changes in the political superstructure along lines of strengthening socialistic democracy do not automatically solve the problem of class relationships; neither do they solve the problem of socialism. It is very important to note this. It is also important to note the fact that new views are being taken of this problem, i.e. that the class struggle in these countries is not being carried out within the framework to which we have become accustomed. Due to the fact that the basic problem of accumulation, both economic and political, manifests itself otherwise than in Europe, the lower classes have a different position in society, and consequently a different approach to the social-political struggle than in Europe. On the other hand, the fact that in certain countries the road to socialistic democracy is opened before the economic class struggle has been won, introduces specific elements into the process of class struggle and provides different bases for the definitions of one or another class or party. I am of the opinion, moreover, that the system of development which India, for example, is employing will for the present create conditions for a broad class struggle, although this will have its own form, and will create new political problems both in the village and the city. The same is true of the other countries of Southeast Asia, although this will be manifest in different ways. The line for developing self-government, even in its initial stages, must lead to a certain sharpness in political relationships, as a broad platform for the development of class and political relationships is being created which will make it possible to form and organize those class forces which will be the bearers of socialism - or those forces opposed to it.

Due to the fact that the problem of accumulation, broadly speaking, is the outstanding one in the countries of Southeast Asia, a special class relationship arises around this problem in relation to the working class. The position of this class in these countries differs from that of the working class during the development of capitalism in Europe or its objective position in modern developed countries. Consequently, the goals, strategy, and tactics of this class will not be the same.

Actually, for the working class and its parties, i.e. the conscious socialistic forces, the central problem which must dominate all strategy and politics is how, by what means, and in which frameworks of society the problem of accumulation can be solved - an understood in the above manner. All other politics will lead to isolationism, sectism, dogmatism, etc. Any workers' party can have temporary success, increase the number of its members, etc., by exploiting the difficult economic situation and the failure of a given regime to solve economic problems. But a party can become powerful only if it can provide clear alternatives and perspectives for solving the problem of accumulation.

As we study the problems of the undeveloped countries of Southeast Asia and their social ferment, we must closely observe the new phenomena which are basically changing the conditions under which new political processes are coming about. In this ferment we see political movements at work which are oriented toward socialism. We also see (and this is actually happening) movements taking place from which anti-socialistic tendencies may develop and be temporarily victorious. We cannot be positive that socialistic forces are actually dominant within individual movements which declare themselves socialistic or that such movements will develop toward socialism from the ideal and political standpoint. This fact increases the responsibility of those personalities which are at the head of such movements.

#### Problems of the labor movements

Labor movements in the countries of Southeast Asia, and especially those parties which are modeled on the European labor parties, both communistic and socialistic, are often at a disadvantage because their policies do not conform with concrete conditions and facts which differ greatly, as we have already mentioned, from those in Europe. Because they do not sufficiently take into consideration the special, objective conditions of these activities, these parties are often unable to create effective tactics or a hegemony of power in progressive social movements. How else can we explain the fact that these movements, led by parties which have developed under the direct influence, and even leadership, of European socialist or communist parties, today, when there is unrest in these countries, are defeated and constantly become less important in the life of these countries?

For us it would seem perfectly logical and normal during democratic decentralization in India for the communists and socialists to support this policy, to enter the self-governing organs and develop them in accordance with their own goals. This is a very progressive method and very effective in the struggle for socialism. The facts, however, are otherwise. Because the methods chosen by the governing powers are not sufficiently socialistic, certain people in these parties are inclined to take a negative attitude toward those methods in general and against the self-governing bodies which are just being formed and in which they might later play an important role. Because the basic class problem is not solved immediately by such a development, they come to the conclusion that they must form an opposition, overlooking the fact that an opportunity is offered for a very effective solution, not only to the problem of economic development, but to the entire class problem as well. Their tactics in the political struggle are limited to the taking over of power exclusively, or more exactly, to the coming into power of their party by parliamentary means. (The latter, following the last party congress, holds true also for the communists). They are therefore following the line of opposition to the government, hence, opposition to the existing and basic organs of progressive social development.

toward socialism. Thus in practice the parties of the left are limited to leftist slogans and phrases, and social progress is moving in one direction while the leftist parties are on the outside and more and more limit themselves to useless and inefficient parliamentary opposition.

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